



A Message to the Oakwood Community

May 31, 2020

Since I first shared my feelings about recent events in our nation on last Thursday morning during the InsideOakwood radio segment, I have continued to reflect on the tragic circumstances that led to the death of Mr. George Floyd. The only words and emotions that come to mind are anger, outrage, and exhaustion. Exhaustion—because we can only wonder how long we will as Black people have to grapple with the incessant devaluation of Black lives.

Anger, because on a personal note I am angry at the relentless psychological and physical assaults upon people of color. Yes, I am angry—the one emotion that is used by society to stereotypically dismiss the voices of “angry black men” and “angry black women.” I am angry about Mr. Floyd’s murder. And I’m outraged when I feel forever doomed to wonder whether black young men will survive a routine traffic stop. I’m outraged, wondering whether young Black women will be safe in their own homes—or strolling through Central Park. It is almost impossible to be an African -American and not have, or to not know someone who has had negative encounters involving race- everything from being followed in stores, to being pulled over while driving a luxury car, or driving in a certain area, to being ignored in department stores because you don’t fit the wealth profile of other patrons...and the list goes on.

But in the wake of Mr. Floyd’s unnecessary and senseless death, I am also determined. I am determined that the Oakwood community will continue to be a center of empowerment and witness to the lives and work of a generation of student standard bearers. Students who will, in the words of Jesus love “the least of these” Matthew 25:40. I am determined that the faith that has guided Oakwood University since 1896, and the cultural legacy handed to us as a Historically Black College and University, will continue to produce generations of Black attorneys, physicians, social workers, dentists, teachers, media and business professionals that combat the ills of our people perpetuated by systems of oppression. Amid great turmoil we must remain focused on our continued intellectual and moral development. I am determined that “the least of these” will be able to financially access an Oakwood education, so that from the blood-soaked sod of this former slave plantation, a new generation of moral activists will be launched. Great thinkers will leave Oakwood’s sacred grounds to not simply make a dollar, but to make a difference. Mr. Floyd, and all of the Mr. Floyds of the past 400 years, deserve this commitment from our institution. Moral passivity is not an option!

The Oakwood University community extends our sympathies to the family of Mr. George

Floyd, and all of the other families who have been touched by the tragedy of unexpected and unnecessary death. We further call upon the thousands of devoted law-enforcement officers, who everyday serve and protect communities, to decry and join efforts to root out this violence perpetrated by bad actors in blue from the police forces across our land. And to the parents who entrust their treasure to Oakwood University, be assured that our impactful work with your young people has only just begun. To the administrators, faculty, staff, and alumni of Oakwood University, we commend you for standing strong on behalf of the ministry of justice on our campus every day.

Finally, to the students of Oakwood University, be it resolved, that you are the generation who will pick up the torch handed to you by the pioneers of civil justice, and we who lead and serve at Oakwood will facilitate your indispensable work and witness. This is your moment! Let no one tell you that the work of “standing for the right, though the heavens fall” is incompatible with the life of faith! Those voices, however sincere, are misguided, because “He has [already] shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of thee, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” Micah 6:6-8. May God bless you, and may God bless the transformative work and mission of Oakwood University!

Yours in service,

President Leslie N. Pollard, Ph.D., D.Min., M.B.A.

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